



## **5. *Intersecting Fractures: The Myriad Challenges Caused by COVID-19 and the Unique Role of Religion in Resolving Them***

### **A Call to Action**

The Italian G20 Presidency has identified a “swift international response” to the COVID-19 pandemic, including reversing escalating global inequalities, as prerequisites to advancing its interconnected pillars of action for the 2021 Summit: People, Planet, and Prosperity. Indeed, the global COVID-19 pandemic has not only posed a significant challenge for global public health, but exacerbated existing political and socio-economic divisions and eroded the stability of governments, economies, and civil societies around the world. As evidenced below, this has directly contributed to violent conflict and civil unrest, which can only be sustainably resolved through careful consideration of the pandemic’s multi-faceted impact, and to avoid the pandemic turning into an epidemic of despair.

In addressing this crisis, in an effort to strengthen global peace and security, the G20 Interfaith Association urges the G20 members to advocate for and model *constructive engagement with religious communities, interfaith organization, elders, traditional leaders, and influencers*, acknowledging their unparalleled social reach and a singular capacity for moral suasion, to support public health initiatives, strengthen economies, build community resilience, and mitigate drivers of violence.

In order to support stable and durable peace, the G20 Interfaith Forum Association recommends that G20 members better understand and engage the unique capacities of religious stakeholders, including moral suasion, networking, material resources, and social reach, in the following ways:

- 1) Develop a permanent secretariat to study the intersection of religion, sustainable development (including public health), and conflict. By providing faith-based actors with a forum to systematically contribute their technical and relational expertise, they can help to reduce the severity of future, unanticipated global crises.
- 2) Partner with active and accountable, global inter-faith action networks to mitigate civil society mistrust and grievances that currently push communities to resist government public health measures, deepen identity conflicts, and radicalize toward violence. This may include an outlet for the expression of shared spiritual values and collaborative action for accelerated vaccine delivery across faith traditions, and would require a public commitment by G20 members to pluralism and religious tolerance.
- 3) Seek partnerships with alternative faith influencers, especially women, particularly where traditional faith community leadership is exclusively male. The pandemic impact, economically, in terms of an increase in domestic violence, and in terms of unpaid labor needed to care for the

sick, has disproportionately fallen on women, who need increased support and offer unique resilience within communities of faith.

4) Build systematic national and global mechanisms to enhance the technical skills and collaborative role of faith actors in responding to increased conflict in vulnerable communities, especially those who were severely affected by the political, economic, and psychosocial consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.